Departmental Short-Term and Long-Term Strategic Issues

Department: <u>Library</u>   <u>FY2007</u>

Short-Term Issues: List critical issues facing the department now and through the next couple fiscal years.

- Planning for the Construction of a New South County Library
  With initial funding in place, identifying and acquiring a site, completing a building plan, and beginning the A&E work for a new library is a high priority. It will be a research-intensive project if the new facility is to be operationally successful and have long-term viability.

- Finding Efficient Work Patterns In Outdated Facilities
  Contemporary library services are radically different from the 1960's, when buildings in this system were constructed. Of the remaining branch libraries not funded in the CIP, both Glenvar and Vinton are cramped, outdated facilities that are worn from decades of heavy traffic (60% of the valley's library patrons use County libraries). The buildings are not improving with age. There is inadequate space or flexibility to accommodate new formats or the equipment required by current technology. The facilities cannot be readily modified to accept new usage patterns, such as multiple format browsing areas or access to self-checkout systems.

- Providing Operational Hours and Services That Meet Public Demand
  Libraries are moving beyond traditional boundaries to become 24/7 operations. Some demand can be met by expanding the services available through the web catalog and e-reference. Surveys and online suggestions, however, indicate that the scheduled operational hours, especially in the evening and on weekends, no longer match what the public needs. Along with extended closing times, patrons continue to ask for Sunday hours in the larger branches and for an expanded, uniform schedule in the two smaller libraries.

- Constant Evolution of the Technology Infrastructure
  Providing a robust and continuously improving telecommunications infrastructure and capable computer workstations for patrons is expensive. New software licenses, product and telecommunication upgrades and technological innovations are in immediate demand to support consumers, young people, and senior citizens. Building on the opportunities presented by wireless access, including a self-checkout system, can be a key component to positively affect public service.

- Insufficient Funding for Collection Development
  Increased circulation (at over 1,000,000 annually, the busiest in the region) and limited funding for the book budget have combined to create a collection that is inadequate to meet the public demand for the latest information, popular reading materials, online databases, and small business resources.

- Providing Adequate Numbers of Well-trained Staff for Effective Public Service
  With a workload that is well above statewide standards and three times that of the other local library systems, the number of staff to cover the current hours of operation is still inadequate. Patron queuing at service points is common. There is not enough support staff to maintain the collection in accessible order, provide sufficient children's storytime programs and activities, or to meet public demand for assistance in all phases of library services. Public access to electronic resources and technology has added a large number of new patrons who need extensive, time-consuming assistance. Database and software training for the staff, which is essential for effective public service, has become difficult to schedule and fund.

Long-Term Issues: List major issues or trends that may confront the department beyond the next couple fiscal years.

- Redesign and Replacement of Library Buildings

Capital-intensive needs must be addressed. (See above) Planning twenty-first century buildings that can grow with the population and accommodate evolving services and products will be a significant challenge, as will identifying funding sources for so many major capital projects.

- Impact of an Aging Population on Library Services
  The continuous and accelerating demographic shift toward an older population will require concomitant adjustments in collection development decisions, electronic hardware purchases, the selection of lighting, fixtures, and furnishings, etc. More and different space will be needed to accommodate senior citizen patrons. Meanwhile, the amount and diversity of resources devoted to younger patrons will have to be adjusted. For example, outreach visits to daycares must become a regular component of children's services.

- Impact of a Changing Valley Demographic
  As the ethnic mixture of the population in the Roanoke Valley changes, the Library has to evolve to meet the needs of a diversifying patron base. Small but growing minority communities, most of which need ESL or native language-based materials and services, will require the Library to diversify its collection development and staff training. It has already become apparent that finding multi-lingual personnel, for example, is extremely challenging but increasingly necessary.

- Impact of New Formats and Online Services
  For a system which has little funding flexibility, the constant introduction of new or redesigned formats (particularly those which are electronic) presents problems, including costs, shelving, durability, and the basic long term viability of the product. The Library is also entering into a potentially limitless phase of services that are delivered online. Chat, e-mail, and instant messaging have made their first appearance in Reference services but will become a staple of circulation as well. Instantaneous responses to requests will be a routine expectation of most patrons. The system will be challenged to offer a service and product structure which is comparable to the national standard.

- Redefinition of the Role of the Public Library
  Instead of functioning only as a resource for on-site visits by patrons, libraries are developing an equal role as an intermediary for and collector of electronic resources, online data, and services. The e-patron revolution is fully underway; the rising expectations of this group will force a new library design to emerge.

- Maintaining the Full Functionality of the Basic Automation Operating System
  It will become increasingly important that the library find enough resources to invest in advances in automation software and supporting hardware that allow patrons greater access to and control of their own information and records, alleviate peak time queuing, and enable the library to "push" pertinent information to them via electronic communication.

- Regional Cooperation
  Although the public libraries in the valley have had a strong cooperative relationship for nearly two decades, they remain separate entities with compatible but very distinct service philosophies.   The challenge will be to seek and exploit every opportunity for collaboration.

- Pursuit of Grants, Fund Raising, Donations and Endowments
  Since the funding of state aid is perpetually inconsistent, the identification and development of partnerships and grants or the creation of an endowment-like entity to support long term financial stability will have to be a priority.

- Additional Professional Staff
  The system needs to recruit additional professional staff, including a young adult librarian to help meet the unique service needs of teenagers and a development coordinator to seek grants and funding that could help alleviate budgetary shortfalls.